



PRUSSIANISM

ADDRESS OF SECRETARY OF STATE
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In these days when the thought and energy of the Nation are concentrated on the terrible drama in which we are playing so vital a part, it would be idle to take as the theme of a discourse one not directly connected with the subject which is dominant in every mind. It is, therefore, my purpose to consider for a few moments the origin and elements of Prussianism and its relation to the world-wide desire for peace.

The American people by a gradual process of reasoning have reached the firm conviction that a German victory in the European struggle would result in the greatest of perils to this country and to those principles of government which have been ours since we became an independent nation. Whatever may have been our past judgments, we now realize the sinister character of Prussianism which has been manifested in this war. And yet, with this realization of the truth, I find that many Americans, even among those intellectually equipped, have but vague ideas of the perverted mental attitude which made Prussianism possible, and of the reason why a compromise founded upon the Prussian conception of international rights must not even be considered.

To a man who thinks true in these days when passion or hysteria distorts opinions, Prussianism and the idea of an enduring and just peace among nations can never be brought into harmony. They can no more mingle than can oil and water. They are at the very antipodes of human thought. We should then comprehend the true meaning of Prussianism in order to understand the great obstacle to-day to a return to peace while Prussianism is still a power.

In considering the elements of Prussianism which made this war inevitable, we should also consider the relation of Prus-

sianism to peace, the supreme desire of mankind, and its relation to war with all its suffering and destructiveness. The wastes of western Europe, the ships and corpses in the ocean's depths, the forest of crosses marking the graves of slaughtered men, the legions of torn and crippled humanity, and the wretched throngs of unhappy women and children are sad witnesses to the horrors of war. On these spectacles of brutality, misery and desolation, all civilized peoples gaze with anguish and bitterness.

As there comes an increasing realization of the needlessness of it all, indignation and anger burn in the hearts of men. But in spite of the bitterness aroused by these tragical scenes, they hope for peace, they pray for peace, and they look forward to that day when rest will come to this tormented world which has endured so much. Yet, even as they hope and pray and search the future with yearning eyes, the armies and navies of democracy fight on with a grim determination which seems to contradict the hope and purpose of humanity.

Peace the world may seek with passionate longing, but not a peace which contains the seeds of future wars and future suffering. When an end comes to this great war, as it will come, it must result in a peace that is final and enduring.

Surely mankind has not borne this burden of agony for naught. After all this woe and waste, a temporary and unstable peace would be a curse rather than a blessing. A firm foundation must be found and is to be found in the frank and clear declaration by President Wilson of the aims which the Republic seeks in this war and which, with God's help, it will attain, whatever the cost may be. Nothing less will satisfy the American people; nothing less will content the democracies of the earth.

The conditions which prevailed prior to August, 1914, produced this conflict. It is not then in a return to the *status quo ante* that lasting peace is to be found, though that, with domination of the Slavic peoples on their eastern borders, appears now to be the minimum terms of the Teutonic Powers. To restore those pre-war conditions would be to invite a new disaster. Peace must rest on a more substantial basis, for the

world seeks to have done with war and with conditions which produce war. However long it may take, however great the sacrifice may be, physical might uncontrolled by morality must never again be considered a standard of international right. Justice must and will become the supreme force in human affairs. No other result will insure civilization against the evil passions which to-day convulse the earth.

I do not believe—in fact it seems to me to be unbelievable—that the blood of brave and devoted hearts, so generously poured out on land and sea in the cause of liberty, is being shed in vain, or that the vast treasures, wrested from the earth by man's enterprise and industry, are being wasted in the support of so sacred a cause. But these lives and these riches have been wasted unless from the ashes of these sacrifices, which have been offered on the altar of liberty, there arises a peace which shall endure. It can not be that the merciful Ruler of the Universe has permitted humanity to suffer all this without conferring a lasting blessing.

The conditions which brought on this war are rooted in the past and are not of sudden or spontaneous growth. They are the natural development of influences which have been long at work in Prussianized Germany and which the rest of the world ought to have perceived but did not. We can now with a clear vision look back through the history of Prussia and see the motives which inspired the conduct of her rulers. We can now read the words of Prussia's statesmen and of the masters of recent German thought with understanding minds.

We now recognize that the policies of the Imperial Government of Germany and the boasted "kultur" of the German people have been concentrated on the single purpose of expanding the territory and power of the Prussian Emperor of Germany, until he, through the possession of superior force, became the primate of all the rulers of the earth. World dominion was the supreme object. That was and is the central thought of Prussianism. It excited the cupidity of the governing and wealthy classes of the Empire and dazzled with its anticipated glories and by its promise of a boasted racial superiority the German millions who were to be the instruments

of achievement. Germans of high and low degree believed dominion over all nations to be the destiny of their race, and with a devotion and zeal worthy of a better cause turned their energies into those channels which would aid the ruling class in their plans to attain the summit of earthly power, Germany's vaunted "place in the sun."

I know that many Germans indignantly deny that this ambition for supremacy has inspired the conduct of the German Government or that it existed in the minds of the German people. I wish sincerely that it were so, for it would make the problems of the future far more easy of solution. But the numerous utterances of German thinkers and writers belie these defenders of Germany's purity of motive.

It is hardly open to debate, in the light of subsequent events, that the philosophical and political ideas which have been taught for years from the university platforms, from the pulpits, and through the printed word to young and old in Germany excited in them an insolent pride of blood and infused into their national being an all-absorbing ambition to prove themselves "supermen" chosen by natural superiority and by divine mandate to be rulers of the earth. Not only in Germany but among those of German descent in other lands has this pernicious belief spread, linking Germans everywhere to the "Fatherland" in the hope that they would be considered worthy to share in the future glory of the masters of the world.

A few examples of the teachings, which have so molded German character and implanted in the German mind false conceptions of life, will suffice to show their nature and the evil influences which they exerted on a people peculiarly susceptible to flattery and possessed by a selfishness which blunted their sense of honor and of moral obligation.

Prof. Theuden, imbued with an astounding vanity, which is characteristically German, declared, as the great war began, "Germany, as the preponderant power in a Pan-German League, will with this war attain world supremacy." And Poehlmann, in considering the good to Germany which would result from the conflict, wrote to his fellow countrymen, "We shall be an unconquerable people capable of ruling the world."

These words but described those visions which the German philosophers, acting possibly under the direction and certainly with the approval of their Government, had so constantly conjured up to allure and tempt the German people. They were uttered before the great Prussian war machine had failed in its first endeavor to plough its way through to Paris and in proving itself to possess the irresistible force in which its builders believed.

A decade before the war Reiner, inspired with the imperialism of Prussia, announced, "It is precisely our craving for expansion which drives us into the paths of conquest, in view of which all chatter about peace and humanity can and must remain nothing but chatter."

Not less ominous to liberty are the words of Prof. Meinecke, "We want to become a world people. Let us remind ourselves that the belief in our mission as a world people has arisen from our originally purely spiritual impulse to absorb the world into ourselves."

Observe that extraordinary phrase, "*to absorb the world into ourselves.*" To conceive such a national destiny is to resurrect the dead ambitions of an Alexander or a Caesar; to teach it as a right to young men is to sow in their minds an egotism which breeds distorted conceptions of individual honor and justice, and gives to them an utterly false standard of national life.

Not alone from the lecturer and the essayist came this idea that the Germans are a superior race set apart to rule the world. It was preached in the pulpits as a divine truth by those who even had the effrontery to support their assertions by references to the Holy Scriptures. Listen to some of the thoughts proclaimed by ordained ministers of Christ to their German congregations.

"It may sound proud, my friends, but we are conscious that it is also in all humbleness that we say it; the German soul is God's soul; it shall and will rule over mankind."

May we be spared the consequences of German "humbleness" which fairly struts and swaggers and which finds further expression in the words of another doctor of divinity when he declares: "Verily the Bible is *our* book. It was given and as-

signed to *us*, and in it we read the original text of *our* destiny, which proclaims to mankind salvation or disaster *as we will it.*"

"*As we will it!*" There, in four words, is the whole story of the Prussian doctrine of the "super-man," of a "place in the sun," of "world-dominion." What a combination of sacrilege and vanity to assume that the Almighty would confer on a people, such as the Prussians have shown themselves to be, divine powers on earth!

These are enough, though many more might be given, to show the monstrous ideas which have for a generation been poured into the receptive minds of a stolid, stubborn people, unhabituated to think for themselves, who have, through these ideas, become fairly saturated with the belief in their invincible power, in their racial superiority, and in God's selection of them, or rather their rulers, to be His partners in governing the world.

Side by side with the egotistical conception of the Prussians that they have a monopoly on the favor and power of the Creator, there is another which is utterly savage and un-Christian. While it has been variously expressed by the materialists of this generation, Felix Dahn 40 years ago uttered the naked thought, which has since been interpreted into action by German militarism. Thus wrote the poet, "It is the joyous German right with the hammer to win land. We are of the Hammer God and mean to inherit his empire." That is, the earth.

This deification of brute force with the attendant right of the strong to be masters of the weak touched a responsive chord in the Prussian mind, and was by some paradoxical process welded to the so-called Christian philosophy of Prussia's theologians. Thus Thor and Odin stalk again along the shores of the Baltic summoning the tribesmen to battle. Their blood-stained altars have again burst into flame in the hearts of the Prussians. Their fierce priesthood again clamor for victims. In the place of a god of love and mercy the Teutons of the north have raised on high their ancestral gods of brutality and war.

Paganism, tintured with modern materialism and a degenerate type of Christianity, broods to-day over Germany. Christian ministers have proclaimed Jehovah to be the national deity

of the Empire, a monopolized "German God," who relies on the physical might of His people to destroy those who oppose His will as that will is interpreted by His chosen race. Thus the Prussian leaders would harmonize modern thought with their ancient religion of physical strength, through brutalizing Christianity.

Minds filled with such conceptions of the sacredness of conquest and of the divine right of a ruler to command obedience have furnished fertile soil for the Prussian policy of acquiring territory and mastery by brute force regardless of justice, morality or the rights of others. This strange mental slavery of a people, as highly developed intellectually as the Germans, is one of the most extraordinary psychological phenomena of modern times. It is hard to analyze it, and even harder to find for it a plausible explanation.

In such congenial environments the ideas of the absorption of Belgium and the Netherlands, of the Germanizing of the Scandinavian and Slavic countries, of Mittel-Europa, and finally of a world empire greater even in relative extent than that of Macedon or Rome, germinated and thrived. To make ready for the year and the day when these extravagant dreams of conquest were by force of arms to be made realities and when all nations would be subjugated by the imperial power of Germany, absorbed the thought and dictated the acts of the Prussians who had so successfully subdued their Germanic neighbors, at first physically and later mentally, until they belonged body and soul to their war lords.

With this vast ambition in their hearts the rulers of Germany sent forth swarms of agents throughout the world to create, in so far as they were able, conditions favorable to the great enterprise. Some sought to win the good will of the nations to which they were sent; others, to alienate or weaken the friendships between nations, whose alliance or mutual support the German Government feared would constitute a possible obstacle to its great scheme of world conquest.

Sincere and honest, the Governments against which these intrigues were directed believed the Imperial German Government to possess a character like their own. Naturally trustful

they fell victims to the snares set to entrap them. There seems to have been no depths of infamy which the Germans did not sound in carrying out their foreign policy of deception.

In what a new light many events of the past appear when the truth becomes known! The "Yellow Peril" speech of the Kaiser, the wholly unjustified suspicions of imperialistic designs on the part of the United States whispered artfully among nations of South America, the financial schemes and revolutions promoted secretly by Germans in the Caribbean countries, the encouragement of continued turmoil and anti-American feeling among warring factions in Mexico, and the propaganda of distrust and hostility carried on in this country and in Japan are among the things "made in Germany" directly affecting the international relations of the United States. It is only within a comparatively recent time that we were fully convinced of their origin and gave them their true labels. Yet, because we were so innocent and trusting, the unpleasant truth comes as a greater shock and excites a deeper resentment.

In addition to these practices, which had been in operation long before the Great War and were preliminary to that supreme event in the Prussian plan, I might refer to the plots which, after the war began and while this country was still neutral, were directed, approved, or financed by Count Bernstorff, Von Papen, Boy-Ed, Luxburg, Von Eckhardt, and other official representatives and secret agents of the Berlin Government. But the activities of these men have been exposed and their disgraceful record is common knowledge arousing a just indignation throughout this country.

I think that I might say, however, that for a long time before it was considered wise to make the facts public the American Government, possessing evidence of their improper conduct, kept constant watch over these conspirators who depended upon the innocent credulity of "those idiotic Yankees," as Capt. Von Papen sneeringly called us. These complacent plotters little suspected how much was known of the activities of the German embassy in Washington, the military agency in New York, the consulates in various cities, and the numerous spies in German employ by those whom they thought they were deluding.

These agents credited the miscarriage of many of their schemes to chance, which had they known the true cause would have given them some very indigestible food for thought.

In view of this spirit of hypocrisy and bad faith manifesting an entire lack of conscience we ought not to be astonished that the Berlin foreign office never permitted a promise or a treaty engagement to stand in the way of a course of action which the German Government deemed expedient. I need not cite as proof of this fact the flagrant violations of the treaty neutralizing Belgium and the recent treaty of Brest-Litovsk. This discreditable characteristic of the German foreign policy was accepted by German diplomats as a matter of course and as a natural, if not a praiseworthy, method of dealing with other governments. Frederick the Great with cynical frankness once said: "If there is anything to be gained by it, we will be honest. If deception is necessary, let us be cheats." That is, in brief, the immoral principle which has controlled the foreign relations of Prussia for over a hundred and fifty years.

It is a fact not generally known that, within six weeks after the Imperial Government had, in the case of the *Sussex*, given to this Government its solemn promise that it would cease ruthless slaughter on the high seas, Count Bernstorff appreciating the worthlessness of the promise asked the Berlin foreign office to advise him in ample time before the campaign of submarine murder was renewed in order that he might notify the German merchant ships in American ports to destroy their machinery, because he anticipated that the renewal of that method of warfare would in all probability bring the United States into the war.

How well the ambassador knew the character of his Government, and how perfectly frank he was. He asked for the information without apology or indirection. The very bluntness of his message shows that he was sure that his superiors would not take offense at the assumption that their word was valueless and had only been given to gain time, and that, when an increase of Germany's submarine fleet warranted, the promise would be broken without hesitation or compunction. What a commentary on Bernstorff's estimate of the sense of honor and good faith of his own Government!

Before this war began we would not have thought any Government on earth capable of such indifference to truth. We admit that we have been the dupes of the military clique in Berlin because dishonesty of this sort seemed to us inconceivable in these days of international honor and Christian civilization. But I believe that the nations, and I am certain that the United States, will never again be caught in a net of duplicity equal to that which was spread all over the world by the Berlin Government. We have learned our lesson and it has cost us dear. We will never have to learn it again.

In this consideration of Prussianism, with its pagan philosophy and its perversion of the German mind, I shall not attempt to enter upon a recital of the horrible brutalities perpetrated by the German armies in the prosecution of the war. They have been too often told to require repetition. It would be the needless reading of a catalogue of black deeds of cruelty, which would sicken a tiger, by a nation which claims not only to be moral and possessed of humane sentiments, but to be actually commissioned by the Supreme Being to carry out His will. I only mention them here as a further manifestation of the revival in Germany of the adoration of brute strength and pitiless war and of the subordination of every noble instinct to the heartless materialism of the ruling class, who seek only power and possessions without regard to the means by which they are attained. In a word, to show what Prussianism means when translated into action.

But we ought not to be surprised at these terrible manifestations of frightfulness in view of the past record of Prussia. It was Goethe, I think, who said, "The Prussians are naturally cruel; civilization will make them ferocious." It has made them ferocious. Acquired science merely gave them increased ingenuity in the indulgence of their passion for cruelty. Let me read you an extract from an article which appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* of February, 1871; and, as I read, remember this was written of the German invasion of France nearly half a century ago. It might have been written in February, 1915, so truly does it portray Prussianism as we know it to-day.

For six months one-third of France has been given up to fire and sword. For 300 or 400 miles vast armies have poured on. Every vil-

lage they have passed through has been the victim of what is only an organized pillage. Every city has been practically sacked, ransacked on system; its citizens plundered, its civil officials terrorized, imprisoned, outraged, or killed. The civil population has been, contrary to the usage of modern warfare, forced to serve the invading armies, brutally put to death, reduced to wholesale starvation and desolation. Vast tracts of the richest and most industrious districts of Europe have been deliberately stripped and plunged into famine, solely in order that the invaders might make war cheaply. Irregular troops, contrary to all the practices of war, have been systematically murdered, and civil populations indiscriminately massacred, solely to spread terror. A regular system of ingenious terrorism has been directed against civilians, as horrible as anything in the history of civil or religious wars. Large and populous cities have been, not once, but twenty, thirty, forty times bombarded and burnt, and the women and children in them wantonly slaughtered, with the sole object of inflicting suffering. All this has been done, not in license or passion, but by the calculating ferocity of scientific soldiers.

And yet the world, in spite of this hideous picture of Prussianism, failed to read the truth or to profit by it. To-day the beast is again at large, devouring the helpless victims who fall into his power: Has not the time come to end this fiendishness?

Much as enlightened mankind may revolt at the idea, the only way to stay this onrush of blood and desolation, which is the direct consequence of the mad impulses which now hold sway over the German mind, is to prove conclusively that the Prussian masters of Germany, though they are armed with the full strength of the Empire and of its subservient allies, do not possess the physical might to impose their will on the human race, that the ancient gods of the Teutons are false gods, and that the philosophy which has cast over the German people a robe of superior attributes is the product of a consuming vanity and pride.

This idea is distasteful, as it should be, to a world which loves peace and craves repose, because the only instrument which can be employed is force of arms. It means war, unceasing war, until the arrogant and brutal Prussians are humbled, until the Kaiser and his military chieftains despair of their ambitions, until the German people realize that their insolent

lords are not touched by divine fire and do not have at their command the powers of heaven. The great free nations of the globe have the task laid upon them to destroy the spirit of Prussianism. This they must accomplish if they would preserve for the future those rights of man which it has taken centuries of struggle to wrest from the grasp of despotism.

If the German Government as it is now constituted should succeed to any extent in its purposes, or even if it should not be defeated in the present war, the doctrine and hopes which are now dominant over the German people will not die. Peace under such conditions could hardly mean more than a brief respite from bloodshed, an unstable truce, during which the Prussian rulers of the Central Powers would devote their energies to preparing for another onslaught on democracy and liberty, for another attempt to win world sovereignty.

It is true that the free peoples of the earth would never again be found as unprepared as they were before this war, to meet a militant Germany, and would never again be victimized by German intrigue and perfidy. Every government would look to that. But such a state of uncertain peace would compel the whole world to remain under arms in anticipation of German aggression. The resources of the nations, already so heavily taxed by this war, would have to be further burdened for the maintenance of great military and naval establishments. Peace would be in constant jeopardy because it would depend on the belief of Germany's rulers as to their ability to succeed in a new essay of conquest.

It is not such a peace as that which will satisfy the longing of the world. It seeks and must have a peace which will silence for the future the clash of arms and will make needless the marshaling of armies and the assembling of navies—a peace so secure and so certain that man's energies may be safely devoted to the productive and not the destructive pursuits of life, and nations may develop without fear of becoming the prey of foreign aggression.

This great war must end with a decision which will be a blessing and not a curse to the present generation and to future gen-

erations. Prussianism, with its distorted ideas, its false conceptions, and its intolerable cruelties, must be brought to an end. The Germanizing of other countries must cease. The dream of "Hamburg to the Persian Gulf" and of an enslaved Poland and Russia must be dispelled. German diplomacy and intrigue, as now practiced, must be proclaimed an international crime and suppressed forever. The philosophy of the "super-man" and of world mastery must die discredited. The evil influences which have so long poisoned the minds of the German people must lose their potency.

Until these great objects are accomplished, as they will be when the war aims stated by the President are attained, we must go on with the war. There is no other way. Peace without a radical change in present conditions or even in those conditions preceding the war would be interpreted by the German people as a vindication of Prussianism. The German Empire would continue to accept its doctrines and to menace the world.

We must go on with the war, intensifying our efforts and expending all our energies and resources, if need be, to obtain the great purpose for which we strive. This task must not be left half done. We must not transmit to posterity a legacy of blood and misery. The world must be made a safe place in which nations and individuals may live free and happy lives.

We must go on with the war until the desire of the nations is satisfied and until human liberty is forever freed from the peril which will continue so long as greed and ambition and blood lust dominate the German Empire, so long as Prussianism is supreme in the mind of the German people.

We may in this great conflict between civilization and savagery go down into the valley of shadows because our foe is powerful and inured to war. We must be prepared to meet disappointments and temporary reverses, but we must, with American spirit, rise above them. With courageous hearts we must go forward until this war is won.

Closely associated, as I have been in these critical days, with our great leader, Woodrow Wilson, I have been more and more impressed with his wise judgment, with his stern determination

to lead democracy to victory, and with his utter confidence in the unity and splendid spirit of the Nation.

Let us, as loyal citizens of the Republic, serve in this mighty crusade against Prussianism, confident, as our President is confident, that the righteousness of our cause and the courage and tenacity of the American people will carry this war through to victory and to peace.

